

Senate Joint Resolution 23
February 13, 2009
Presented by Chas Van Genderen
Senate Education and Cultural Resources Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chas Van Genderen, Acting Parks Division Administrator of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

I appear in support of Senate Joint Resolution 23.

Montana is a special place, and our outdoors is second to none. Our Montana lifestyle is tied to having wild places to roam. FWP has been in the business of helping people connect to the state's fish, wildlife, and parks through managing resources for more than 100 years.

Throughout our history as a department, we have recognized the importance of the connection between the youth of Montana and the ongoing stewardship of Montana's rich outdoor heritage.

While we host million of visitors and recreationists annually, we have witnessed an increasing interest in and need for additional opportunities for youngsters to connect with their natural environment. With that increased interest, we have stepped up our efforts. Among other things we now have an interactive "Montana Ecosystems" project on our website that is receiving more and more use from educators around Montana; and, we are currently working on customizing our stewardship messages to better fit target audiences. We have been involved with the Governor's Math and Science Initiative, our Parks Division has initiated a Children and Nature Action Plan, and just this last fall FWP helped organize and sponsor a, first of its kind, Children and Nature Summit here in Helena.

We have been involved and support this resolution because of the consistent evidence that supports the fact that a child's contact with nature and the outdoors can improve their physical, mental and emotional well being and commitment to stewardship in the future.

The next generation of stewards of Montana's exceptional natural resources is growing up in a society that is becoming more sedentary, increasingly plugged into electronic media, and for many increasingly disconnected from the land.

FWP recognizes the importance of this issue and the need to engage in dialog with a variety of partners to discuss and develop strategies to engage our young people in healthy active lifestyles that connect them to our natural world.

Again, we urge your support of SJR 23 and look forward to working with the many individuals and groups interested in this very worthwhile effort.